

Board Meeting
Tuesday, April 5, 2011
Teleconference
7 p.m. – 8 p.m.

The Department of Human Rights board meeting was called to order by Chairperson Dr. Jill Olsen at 7:01 p.m., Tuesday, April 5, 2011. The meeting was held by teleconference to address the state budget, which is changing quickly and did not allow time to arrange an in-person meeting.

Members present: Dr. Jill Olsen, Floyd Winter, Lasheila Yates, Nathan Monson, Stephan Pearson, Joan Jaimes (joined in progress)

Ex Officio present: Director Isaiah McGee, Executive Assistant Danielle Plogmann

Staff members present: Executive Assistant Danielle Plogmann

Report on Budget:

Director McGee:

-The Iowa House passed the annual budget proposal, HF646, on Monday night and it includes a 27% cut to DHR's advocacy services in 2012. The bill was amended during debate to cut an additional 25% from advocacy services in 2013, which is essentially a 50% cut to CAS division over a two-year period.

- Next the Senate must take up the budget bill and if it differs from the House version, it will go to conference before going to the Governor for possible signature. Director McGee has repeatedly talked with Senate members. Sen. Pam Jochum assures Dir. McGee the Senate's budget is nothing like the House budget. Instead, the Senate budget is more like the Governor's, which proposes only a 6% cut. Additionally, the Senate only intends to budget for one year instead of two.

- Dir. McGee anticipates the Senate will pass a different budget bill and says DHR will have to wait and see who's placed on the conference.

- McGee stressed he has talked with Senators Jochum, Gronstal and Dvorsky regarding the budget and the cuts are not expected to be as severe. Additionally, the Governor has repeatedly said he is pushing for his budget, which proposes a 6% cut.

- McGee said this is not the time to panic, but to be concerned. McGee's concern is that some members of the legislature don't understand what the department does and why it's a good use of taxpayer dollars. Though the reality of a 50% CAS budget reduction might not happen, we need to change the mindset among legislators that believe our work can be done by outside groups.

- McGee will hold a Friday staff meeting, where he will announce to staff and seek their input on an open house for legislators, so legislators can talk to staff and see the work our staff is doing.

- McGee is working with division leaders to compile an impact document explaining the scope and reach of the work of the DHR. Once finalized, the document will go to legislators as well as members of the public. McGee requested assistance from board members in sharing that document.

- McGee clarified, at the request of Mr. Winter, that the open house will be sometime in the next two weeks. Also, all legislators are invited, and especially members dealing with budget issues will be targeted to attend. McGee noted that educating all legislators will also make for easier conversations between supporters and non-supporters.

- Monson noted he liked the idea of an open house. Wondered if there's more that can be done by encouraging outside supporters to draft statements in support of the work of DHR. McGee said he liked the idea, as long as the statements come from a broad coalition of supporters and are very focused on the work that DHR does and why it can't be handled by another organization. McGee also noted that he has already been working with such groups such as the Greater Des Moines Partnership's Diversity committee to do just that.

-Winter noted that the impact message is helpful and should be used beyond budget conversations in the future.

- Dr. Olsen inquired about McGee's lobbying with legislators. McGee responded that he has been meeting with the legislators on a regular basis, especially legislators who deal with appropriations. So far what he's hearing from legislators is "that if you think we're wrong to cut your budget, show us why."

- Yates asked that all board members be updated as action is taken, so members can be responsive to inquiries from their communities. Noting that her and other board members were not aware of a press conference that was held by some other board members recently and the board never took action agreeing to that event.

-Winter requested Dir. McGee distribute talking points in addition to impact statement.

- Yates requested Dir. McGee provide "next steps," too. For instance, if the budget cuts that are forecast do happen, what will the department do. McGee responded that he doesn't want to instill fear or give the impression that the department is going to have to take certain action when it might just be speculation at this point. McGee stressed that education is the top priority at this point. Regardless of who is in power, we must make sure the House, Senate and Governor's office always understand the value of the work DHR does.

- Dr. Olsen inquired about DHR funding and whether Branstad has indicated he supports eliminating the department. McGee responded that Gov. Branstad's office has indicated they look for the continuation of the department. They have funded it in their budget and repeatedly push for the legislature to pass the budget.

- Winter made a motion to direct McGee to proceed with the open house and impact statement and to provide talking points to the board. Stephan seconded. During discussion on the motion, McGee said he will invite the Governor and Lt. Governor, as their schedule permits. Lasheila asked about if commissioners will attend. McGee said the open house is intended for legislators and staff, but commissioners will be included in distribution of impact statements. McGee also noted commissioners are always welcome to use office space for commission work as needed. All six members unanimously voted in support of Dir. McGee's continued education efforts.

Orientation Day Update:

-McGee noted that the orientation for commissioners is confirmed for Friday, May 27, but due to the holiday they are having trouble confirming a location and facilitator for Saturday's strategic planning session. He also stated it might be best to delay the meeting to have time to digest everything learned in commissioner orientation. When asked, McGee answered that the strategic planning does not have to be done by the end of the fiscal year. Also, there wouldn't be much time for staff to determine the impact of the budget that will be passed by the legislature. All members agreed to delay the strategic planning session.

-Winter motioned to adjourn. Pearson seconded. Motion carried by a voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.